
United States Interests and Goals in Nepal

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The United States has a strong interest in helping the people of that country overcome the serious political problems they face, and the developmental problems from which much of their current political crisis derives. Our ultimate goal for Nepal can be put quite simply:

We want Nepal to be a peaceful, prosperous and democratic country where civil liberties and human rights are protected.

However, Nepal confronts the real possibility that a brutal Maoist insurgency might seize power. Unity among Nepal's legitimate political forces is key to preventing that possibility. For this reason we are deeply troubled by King Gyanendra's February 1, 2005 dismissal of the government, declaration of a state of emergency, suspension of fundamental rights, and detention of politicians, journalists and human rights activists. This serious setback for Nepalese democracy risks eroding even further the Nepalese government's ability to resist the insurgency. It must be reversed. King Gyanendra needs to move quickly to reinstate and protect civil and human rights, release those detained under the state of emergency and begin a dialogue with the political parties intended to restore multi-party democratic institutions under a constitutional monarchy.

In recent years, the Maoist presence has spread dramatically throughout Nepal. The Maoists have made clear their intention to impose a one-party "people's republic," collectivize agriculture, "reeducate" class enemies, and export their revolution to neighboring states. The humanitarian ramifications of such a regime would be immense, reminiscent of the nightmare brought upon Cambodia by Pol Pot. Such a regime would almost certainly threaten stability in the region. Much if not all the progress that the United States and others have helped Nepal accomplish in terms of both development and democratization would be negated.

The longstanding political impasse between the king and the political parties, and infighting between and within the parties themselves, has seriously hampered resistance to the Maoists, in spite of the army's growing capability to militarily confront the insurgents. This squabbling and inability to come to an agreement on how to move forward with democratic governance has understandably frustrated the Nepalese caught between government inaction on their grievances and human rights abuses by the security forces on one hand and Maoist violence and brutality on the other.

The United States shares with other friends of Nepal particularly India and the United Kingdom the firm belief that the Maoist insurgency must be resisted and addressed. The Maoists have risen to prominence through a combination of propaganda, terror, and the real despair that so many Nepalese feel over the paralysis and failure of their political institutions. However, Nepalese increasingly reject the Maoists' goal of a one-party republic and no longer tolerate their methods of torture, extortion, and harsh retributions. The Maoists must be convinced that they have to rejoin the political mainstream instead of trying to sweep it away. At the same time, the Nepalese people must be convinced that their government can offer them a better future. The key to accomplishing this is for the legitimate political parties and Nepal's king to unite in a multi-party, democratic framework in order to confront the Maoists and address the country's serious developmental problems. Over the past several years we have pressed political party leaders and the king to follow this course. We will continue to stress this message to the King as we also urge

him to lift the state of emergency and provide clear road maps of how he intends to restore democratic institutions and address the Maoist insurgency. Likewise, we will encourage the political leaders as they are released to ensure their parties rejoin the political process in a constructive manner in order to chart the way ahead.

King Gyanendra has said that his recent actions were intended to strengthen Nepal's multi-party democracy and to bring the Maoist insurgency to an end. The King needs to quickly demonstrate through actions that he is serious in this desire. Initial reaction from many Nepalese to his February 1, 2005 actions was positive, reflecting their widespread frustration and despair over the years of political impasse as the Maoists gained strength. The Nepalese people now expect progress, and they expect it soon. The government needs to release the detainees and lift the suspension of fundamental rights. The King and the political party leaders must sit down and work together to resolve this crisis. To apply Benjamin Franklin's wisdom to their situation, they must hang together, or assuredly, they shall hang separately. We stand ready to help them find ways to cooperate to overcome the challenges to the future of their country.

Given this stark situation, U.S. resources and programs are more important than ever in helping Nepal defeat the insurgency and build a peaceful and prosperous future. We are encouraged that over the past year the international community has become increasingly united in trying to persuade the Maoists to negotiate a just peace. Even if peace were to return, however, the country would need to address daunting problems before it could develop into a prosperous, stable democracy, poverty, illiteracy, infant and maternal mortality, trafficking in persons, corruption, torture, and disappearances. Key to progress in all these areas is economic development throughout the country.

The United States has worked hard with Nepal's leaders to encourage them to adopt a common stance vis-à-vis the insurgents, and prior to February 1, 2005 we saw some limited success in this regard. The King's actions at the beginning of this month have only reinforced our conviction that ending the insurgency requires unity between the King and the politicians. As we seek to deal with the repercussions of February 1, we intend to continue to support, as appropriate, the Government of Nepal's ability to effectively conduct peace talks and prepare for peace. Nepal's security forces continue to have a critical role in denying the Maoists a military victory. Donor assistance has been an important factor in their ability to mount more effective security operations, creating an environment for increased delivery of much-needed services for Nepalese civilians, taking back areas hitherto controlled by the Maoists.

This brings me to the dilemma that we now face in making decisions about security assistance for Nepal, Mr. Chairman. The U.S. security assistance for Nepal this fiscal year is about \$2 million. Strong arguments have been made to use such assistance as a lever with Nepal's government to encourage a rollback of the recent political restrictions. At the same time, nobody wants to see Maoist gains at the expense of a less effective Nepali military. In considering this issue we are very aware of the trade-off between the military risk resulting from cutting aid with the political risk should there be no resolution of the current crisis between the King and the parties. Following on the King's actions, India and the United Kingdom announced they were suspending assistance to Nepal's armed forces. We have the same step under consideration. We have made it clear to the government that in the current political situation our security assistance is at risk. In our security assistance so far, we have supported Nepal's military through professional training, modern rifles and non-lethal equipment. A central part of our program has been to reinforce the critical need for the security forces, some of whom have engaged in serious human rights abuses, to improve their record in this respect.

We are concerned about abuses and atrocities by Maoists and human rights abuses by government security forces including extra-judicial killings and disappearances. An important

focus of our training of, and engagement with, the government and its security services will remain the critical need for increased respect for human rights. We continue to vet units receiving U.S. assistance to ensure that none is implicated in human rights violations. An amendment to the FY 2005 Senate Appropriations bill stipulated that foreign military financing could be made available to Nepal if the Secretary of State determined that Nepal was taking a number of steps to improve the human rights practices of the security forces. We have made it clear to the Government of Nepal that we expect to see appropriate, timely and transparent investigations of any credible allegations of abuse and that failure to do so could jeopardize our ability to continue assistance. We will continue to convey our strong concern about human rights violations by the security forces to the highest levels of the Nepal government and urge swift investigation and punishment.

We have allocated resources to the National Human Rights Commission to assist with recording and storing human rights investigations. As appropriate, we plan to provide additional assistance to the Commission to expand its monitoring and reporting capabilities. It is also critical for us and for the international community to highlight and criticize atrocities and abuses committed systematically, and as a matter of strategy by the Maoists. We will also continue to stress the protection of the rights of marginalized and victimized groups, e.g., trafficked persons, forced and child laborers, including child soldiers. We are seeking a durable solution for the more than 100,000 refugees of Bhutanese origin in Nepal and continue to work closely with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-government organizations to assure the welfare of the many resident and transiting Tibetans in Nepal. The recent government order to close of the Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office and the Dalai Lama's office are also concerns. While we have not seen any change in the flow of Tibetan refugees through Nepal or in the treatment of Tibetan refugees resident in Nepal, we are working with the government to register the office as a fully functioning non-government organizations.

The overwhelming preponderance of the assistance the United States is providing to Nepal — twenty times the amount of our security aid is devoted to the social, political, and economic development the country so desperately needs. One of our key priorities in Nepal is to strengthen democratic institutions and processes, thereby increasing the ability of all Nepalese to have their voice heard. This in turn will undermine the Maoist insurgency whose early progress reflected to some degree the legitimate grievances of Nepal's marginalized citizens. Our work will continue to focus on the restoration of democratic institutions and seek to increase citizen participation and representational diversity in key institutions and processes. We will provide assistance with respect to the planning and conduct of parliamentary elections, if and when they are held. We will also focus on strengthening key rule of law and anti-corruption institutions. Nepal has some of the world's lowest social indicators, and more than half our development assistance has been earmarked for health and family planning. This key assistance to the marginalized part of this country's population is bearing fruit; the vast majority of Nepal's under-five children receive critical Vitamin-A supplements, thereby significantly increasing their ability to fight off otherwise deadly diseases such as pneumonia. The fertility rate is going down and we continue to work to help prevent and contain HIV/AIDS. Through the coordinated efforts by USAID and the Kathmandu-based Regional Environmental Office, we seek to improve access by the poor to non-contaminated drinking water.

I want to assure the Committee that the Administration is deeply engaged in helping to resolve the current crisis in Nepal. President Bush's declaration of the United States' support for freedom around the world very much extends to Nepal. This Administration firmly believes in the expansion of liberty and freedom as the foundation for lasting stability. In the coming weeks and months, we will be following through on this commitment, using our diplomatic leverage and

assistance resources, working closely with Nepal's friends and, most importantly, encouraging the Nepalese themselves to come together to meet these very serious challenges.